

Frequently Asked Questions About Urban Whitetail Deer



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This brochure has been developed from questions that are most often asked of the Missouri Department of Conservation in relation to the Management of White-tailed deer in the Springfield Metro Area. We hope that these will help answer similar questions you may have about one of our greatest natural resources.

1. Q: Do deer live a “different” life in the urban setting versus their relatives in the rural settings?

A: According to a previous study by MDC (of 266 collared deer around St. Louis) deer were found to live a more confined life with the most common form of death being related to DVC's. There are few predators/hunts to control their populations. Urban deer tend to have smaller home ranges (100-300 acres) than do their rural counterparts. Urban deer are many times more likely to die from Deer Vehicle Collisions.

2. Q: What is the primary reason for the lack of deer management in urban areas?

A: Lack of deer management exists because of real or perceived safety concerns, and city ordinances that act to limit management. There are often conflicting social attitudes and perceptions about wildlife management in an urban area. Hunting and weapons discharge -or- restrictions. Liability, public relations, or political concerns, may also be a problem.

3. Q: Who is responsible for the cost of an Urban Deer management program?

A: The cost of special management for deer with in an urban area falls onto the municipalities and/or landowners (if methods such as: sharp-shooting, trap & euthanasia, or damage control) are used. If a method such as controlled hunting were implemented, the bulk of the cost would rely mainly on the hunters (to purchase the necessary state licenses and to process the meat from the deer). The MDC does not pay for special management practices with in these settings, however acts as the technical supporter/advisor to municipalities that wish to better manage their deer herd (as well as other wildlife).

4. Q: What is the projected growth rate of Springfield's urban deer herd if we do nothing?

A: Review of current deer population growth has shown that in as little as five years, the total population of deer with in the metro area could increase as much as 100% (double the current population) if nothing is done to counter their reproductive rates.

5. Q: How did deer populations reach these current levels in our urban/suburban neighborhoods?

A: In the absence of predation and hunting, vehicles and possibly disease are the only factors that control deer within urban/suburban settings. Also, deer are usually welcomed for at least a period of time in most urban settings. They soon become unwelcome, but will not be noted as unwelcome until a gross overpopulation begins to affect all involved persons.

6. Q: What are other Missouri municipalities doing about urban deer?

A: St. Louis Area:

Several Municipalities utilized a Deer Task Force to make recommendations. Putting these recommendations into action, the suburban St. Louis cities of Clarkson Valley and Chesterfield have both adopted revised ordinances that allow for archery hunting. In addition, regulations prohibiting "back yard feeding" of deer have been put in place.

Kansas City Area:

Several Kansas City municipalities have allowed archery hunting within their city limits for many years. The Jackson County Parks system has conducted managed archery and muzzleloader hunts on park land for more than a decade. In 2003 Kansas City changed its ordinance to allow limited managed archery hunts within the city.

Central Missouri Area:

Since 2003 Columbia has utilized a pilot program of archery hunting on certain city – owned tracts of land as well as multiple use parks. Boonville has used a combination of archery hunting on private land, and sharpshooters on both public and private land to control deer numbers. In 2005 the city of Fulton passed an ordinance to allow archery hunting on selected private properties within the city limits in October.

7. Q: Doesn't MDC own all the deer and as such is responsible for their management on both state land and on private land?

A: No and Yes. The deer belong to the citizens of the state. The MDC is charged with the responsibility of managing a healthy deer herd throughout the state. This is accomplished through annual hunting seasons. As far as the MDC is concerned, hunting is allowed in all parts of the state as long as state wide regulations are complied with. Cities can regulate the discharge of weapons and enact other ordinances which prevent hunting.

8. Q: Why is everyone (MDC, Health Department, and City Officials) “passing the buck, so to speak” on who is responsible for deer management?

A: Although MDC is responsible for statewide deer management, the Department does not implement deer management programs on non-MDC lands without consent and cooperation of landowners. MDC serves in an extension role to evaluate deer populations, advise on appropriate management strategies, and establish geographic and regulatory boundaries through which feasible management alternatives can be developed. Most cities refuse to act on urban animal issues until the issue becomes a crisis. This is usually an effort not to upset non-hunting constituents. Successful implementation of management alternatives can only be accomplished with landowner consent and approval. Therefore, extensive effort to inform and educate landowners is essential.

9. Q: What is the Urban Deer Action Committee (UDAC), I have heard about?

A: In April 2006, Missouri Department of Conservation staff helped bring together representatives from a number of southwest Missouri municipalities and agencies in and around the greater Springfield metropolitan area to form the Urban Deer Action Committee. The purpose of this committee is to examine the nature and extent of problems caused by suburban deer and to recommend potential solutions. This committee is modeled after a similar urban deer committee that was formed in 2003 in the St. Louis metropolitan area and has been working with citizens to address deer issues in that area since.

10. Q: Why is there no special interest groups (such as PETA or MO Bow-hunters) included in the UDAC?

A: The UDAC is comprised of governmental agencies/municipalities that either control large amounts of land (in the metro area), or are responsible for the management and implementation of ordinances. It was felt that this was the best solution, because if a member from a special interest group were invited, we would have had to invite all special interest groups that pertained to this topic. The result would have been a much larger UDAC with widely opposing views that might have clashed, taking much longer to begin correcting the problems at hand.

11. Q: What has the UDAC done so far with controlling the deer problem?

A: In addition to researching deer control in other urban areas, the UDAC has recently; conducted a broad mailing survey (~3,000 surveys divided into 10 zip codes), and has held two open public forums to gain insight into what the public feels is necessary to better manage our urban deer.

12. Q: What did the General public feel should be done about the deer?

A: The following numbers represent the acceptable response to the management method question from the survey:

1. Controlled hunting – (somewhat/very acceptable 80%)
2. Sharp -shooting – (somewhat/very acceptable 49%)
3. Trapping & euthanasia – (somewhat/very acceptable 31%)
4. Damage Control *– (somewhat/very acceptable 52%)

* It should be noted that Damage control does nothing to the actual deer population and only deters the deer for a short amount of time.

13. Q: Is hunting safe in community areas?

A: People in an area with controlled hunting are more likely to be involved in a fatal Deer Vehicle Collision (DVC), than in a fatal hunting incident. In addition, hunting is rated as a “safer” sport (per 100,000 participants), than many other favorites including: golf, baseball, and basketball. In addition, an archery hunt (with strict rules and regulations), could be very discreet and safe versus other hunting options.

14. Q: What if a hunted deer moves into another person’s yard and dies there?

A: Eventually, deer like all animals will die, and one that has succumbed to hunting is not different from one dying from “natural” causes or a Deer Vehicle Accident.

15. Q: Is sharp-shooting a safe method of controlling our urban deer?

A: Yes, sharp shooting would be contracted to a company that has professionals highly trained in this deer management method. Small caliber rifles with silencers would be used at short ranges to ensure the publics safety. All meat would be donated to local food banks for use.

16. Q: If the local deer population is reduced, won’t more deer move in?

A: This would not occur in an immediate time period, as deer do not readily leave an established home area (which is determined by the females). An annual harvest of deer would help ensure this.

17. Q: Why can birth control not be used?

A: Simply, there are no current FDA Approved methods for a deer contraceptive. All deer that would be treated (if one were currently available), would have to be permanently marked un-edible due to the levels of hormones with in the drug. These drugs are very expensive and the deer often have to be treated annually to remain, "sterile". Other methods such as sterilization are much too costly for the small amount of the deer population that would be controlled.

18. Q: Why can't you just reintroduce the natural predators of the deer?

A: Such a project is highly unfeasible and socially unacceptable in the state of Missouri. This would never be attempted by the Missouri Department of Conservation.

19. Q: Why does the nature center feed deer to increase their population?

A: The Nature Center does no such thing and the MDC does not recommend feeding any wildlife minus birds/squirrels, (except in years of with extreme winters/drought).

20. Q: Isn't the nature center breeding deer and therefore responsible for the high deer population surrounding the nature center and for subsequent damage?

A: Simply, No. The deer population is at a stable level and does not require stocking.

21. Q: Why does MDC not care about the concerns of their neighbors?

A: The MDC works hard to please everyone with in the state (unfortunately, not everyone can be pleased as there are many varying opinions on how different situations should be handled). In addition, the MDC encourages local municipalities to act in a way they see necessary to best serve their citizens and will not override such a decision.

However, population projection numbers show that a yearly harvest of 10% of the current population (in does) would be sufficient to stabilize the population at their current numbers. (Note a higher number of deer would need to be harvested in an area where a population reduction is desired).

22. Q: What can I do to control deer damage to my property?

A: Chemical Deterrents

In recent years, many chemical deterrents have come onto the market for use by property owners. They are usually based on a smell that deer do not like, or may make plants taste bitter when consumed. There are also many variations of these that may be produced at home from ordinary ingredients such as: old eggs, hot sauce, soaps, and shampoos. Recipes for such concoctions may be found on the internet, in the

bookstore, or possibly at you local Department of Conservation office. Always follow all instructions for use when applying these deterrents.

Visual and Sound Deterrents

Visual deterrents are another popular “easy” method of control that may scare deer from your property. These can range from the home built versions (Mylar ribbons with aluminum pie plates clanging in the wind) to professionally built devices (such as the popular propane cannons). One set back to these forms of deterrents is that after a period of time, the deer may become used to them. If you feel deer in your area have done this, try “changing” these deterrents in an irregular pattern to keep deer annoyed.

Netting

Appropriate in certain situations, netting may be placed over specific plants that deer have been feeding on. The netting “excludes” most of the plant from the mouths of hungry deer. Netting can be purchased at hardware and home improvement stores.

Fencing (Electric & Traditional)

Fencing is one of the most effective ways to exclude your yard or plants from deer. In many cases, if you are not familiar with fencing, it may be wise to contact a qualified fencing contractor.

The following is a **brief** description for the use of fencing to control deer damage to your property.

Electric fencing is usually comprised of a single wire held by insulated posts approximately 30 inches off of the ground. To prevent problems, all vegetation near the fence must be maintained as to prevent touching which would short out the fence. To add to the effectiveness, pieces of aluminum foil smeared with peanut butter may be placed in even intervals on the fence to encourage deer to “taste” it. Because of their thick hair, the mouth is one of the only highly vulnerable areas of a deer to electric shock. The shock received is not fatal, but over a period of time will make the deer associate the boundary with an “unwelcome-feeling”. Children, pets and neighbors are also vulnerable to these fences and **warning signs** should be placed at regular intervals.

Traditional fencing is quite possibly the best method for excluding deer from your property. These fences can be built in several forms, although the classic 8 foot tall “checkered” fence is most effective. Deer are incredible jumpers, so it is necessary for these fences to be at least 8 feet tall. While electric fences may be cheaper, they are more of a temporary fix. Traditional fencing will often last many years (but is considerably more expensive). A major turn-off with the traditional fencing is the so called, “prison” look it gives to a property.

Guard Dogs

Using a “guard dog” may also provide some relief from persistent deer on your property. There is no necessary breed requirement, just a dog with a lot of energy that likes to bark at the so called “intruders” in the yard.

Concluding Thoughts

As discussed, managing white-tailed deer in an urban setting can be a challenging situation. They are a very robust species of animal that adapts to nearly any condition given to it. Hopefully one of these previously mentioned methods for control will assist you if you have a current deer problem. If you do not have a deer problem, be proactive. It is easier to control the problem before it starts. **Before instating any control methods, be sure to consult; city / county ordinances, and state wildlife code regulations to make sure they are legal.**

